**Genesis 4:1-15**

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7  If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” 8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” 10 And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” 13 Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” 15 Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

**“A Living Sacrifice”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. With such a well-known Old Testament text today, it is easy to label Abel good and Cain bad. Whether it is the false piety of Pharisees or the murderous spirit of Cain, none wants to associate with them. Yet, that leaves us with the tax collector who was certainly no good person and Abel did not earn his goodness by what he gave to God. We toss those terms, “good/bad” around all the time. Kids can identify superheroes in cartoons and politics tries to sway voters playing a similar game. However, while we try to live with those labels of good/bad, God has one classification; all bad and He alone good.

God had no favoritism between the children of Adam and Eve. Cain was just as valuable as Abel. Yet, the difference between these brothers was not about good or bad. It dealt with the Gospel, about God’s grace alone for sinners, about salvation received as a gift. So we read from the New Testament book of Hebrews, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous…” (Hebrews 11:4). Likewise, there is a warning about degrading God’s promise of salvation with any other kind of glory for Jude states, “Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain…” (1:11). The cure for our violent raging as sinners is to receive God’s merciful victory in Jesus.

1. **Violence never gives what it demands in the hands of sinners.**
2. Cain felt his offering was something special being the firstborn son, but he was in for a surprise.

* Problems arise when works try to justify sinners.
* “Cain was very angry and his face fell.” (pride)
* Hostility then turns against God when the rightness of sinners fails.
* Killing Abel lead only to Cain’s accusation, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Adam blamed his fall into sin on God given him Eve!)
* Denial finally sees no good from God because of the weight of sin.
* Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” (despair)

1. What do we expect before God that seeks anything less than His mercy?

* Our problem is works apart from faith are violent!
* Jesus says, “…out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).
* Hostility toward God flares up when failure cannot be an option.
* Who is our Abel we kill without grief or fear? (Unborn, marriage, political hate, the needy.)
* Denial of God is the result because sin is just too great.
* Since the Law scares us, the cure today is to change it so by a new standard can be achievable and no one sees sin.

1. **Violence needs better treatment that God alone extends to sinners.**
2. The hypocrisy of Cain was to receive what he could not give himself.

* God addresses the “heart” of violence with mercy.
* In the midst of shame and discontent over his offering God provided care to Cain. Luther offers a more revealing translation, “If you do well, will there not be forgiveness? But if you do not do well, sin lies at the door.”
* God also turns toward the hostility proving His faithful Word stands.
* God asked Adam hiding in the garden, “Where are you?” The same cover up by Cain was no secret, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.”
* God knows the weight of sin and promises deliverance from the darkness of judgement.
* The fearful consequences over sin saw no good, but the Lord was quick to say, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.”

1. We revel in hypocrisy not realizing the violence that is apart from what God gives for sinners.

* God’s mercy is not to trust in works, but to live by faith.
* Jesus is the Word who calls all disappointed Cains to His forgiving promise saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)
* The Lord stands against our hostility no matter how we make it look holding up the Law.
* “What have you done?” is Jesus’ cry to repent for nothing hides from Him, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me”(Matthew 25:40)
* God faces our weight of sin with deliverance for the Gospel makes no demands.
* Whether sin like Cain, Judas, Peter, or Paul Jesus says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16)

1. **Violence has an end by the merciful victory God has worked out in a violent world.**
2. Eve thought highly of her firstborn son having said, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”

* What a shock to humanity that salvation was going to be 100% a work of the Lord.
* Yet, God does not go back on His Word of promise.
* One born from woman would put to shame the plots of the Devil.
* The sinless life of Christ fulfilled the Law and temptation never turned Him away from perfect faith in His Father.
* One sacrifice does cry out for grace even louder than the blood of Abel a herdsman.
* This is the Good Shepherd not dead in the ground, but Jesus going into us to eat and drink of His sacrifice.
* One now reigns with life everlasting marking any with deliverance in His Name.
* If the first death caused fear over violence, dying to Christ by baptism let St. Paul say, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.”

A lighthearted fundraiser last week, turned again to jousting between presidential candidates. Entertaining yes, serious issues indeed, but a single comment stuck out. It was this, “Now I am not a Catholic, I am a Methodist, but one of the things we share is the belief that in order to achieve salvation we need both faith and good works.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Wrong. Achieving salvation is God’s work alone. Faith receives the justifying promise that no works satisfy. Our cry is, “…God be merciful to be a sinner.” Cain very well could be in heaven with his brother Abel, but the Scriptures are silent. What we do know are labels like “good or bad” get in the way of God’s grace going out to sinners. Offerings of thanks and praise with our whole life simply honor and uphold the good God of salvation. A world trapped in violence needs love witnessing to the truth of how God loves us. The cure for our violent raging as sinners is to receive God’s merciful victory in Jesus. Amen. Now the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)